

Swarming in *Opetia nigra* Mg. (Diptera, Platypezidae) and the Capture of a Female

By IAN McLEAN*

While collecting insects visiting blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa* L.) blossom on the afternoon of 28th April, 1976, I noticed what appeared to be a small dancing swarm of *Microphorus* (Empididae) overhead. Earlier I had "pooted" one individual from a blackthorn twig, and before leaving the locality I gently swept the swarm and collected five of the insects. Later when sorting the catch I realised the captured insects were *Opetia nigra* Mg., and amongst the five specimens swept from the swarm there was a single female (seldom found in this species). This female was not the specimen captured from the blackthorn bush, as this was a male taken in a separate tube together with other insects captured on the flowers. The swarm consisted of approximately ten individuals, and was centred about eight feet above ground. The blackthorn bush was situated on the west side of a mixed deciduous wood adjoining an area dominated by reeds (*Phragmites communis* Trin.) at Earlham Woods, Norwich (grid reference TG 1807). The weather at the time of capture was cloudy with sunny intervals and a slight northerly breeze. I cannot trace any previous published record of swarming in *O. nigra* being observed, and in fact very little is known of the biology and habits of this species.

The following day (29th April), Mr. John Ismay swept two female *O. nigra* at Norman's Burrow Wood, Norfolk (TF 8923). They were taken over low vegetation, mainly Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis* L.) in warm and sunny weather conditions. On this occasion no males were taken, so presumably these females were not associated with a swarm.

Finally, a single female *O. nigra* was taken in a yellow water trap at the edge of a field of winter wheat at Easton, Norfolk during a sampling programme for cereal aphids and their predators within the week 23rd-30th June, 1976.

John Ismay has recently checked the Collin-Verrall collection (at the Hope Department, Oxford) for female *O. nigra*, and as a result I can put on record the following captures, which give a wider range of dates than the other captures of females recorded here.

Under *O. nigra*: Chippenham Fen, 13.x.1943, J. E. Collin, 1 ♀;
Newmarket, Raylands, 10.viii.1948, J. E. Collin, 1 ♀;
Newmarket, Raylands, 30.iv.1949, J. E. Collin, 1 ♀.

Under *O. lonchopteroides* Curtis, now considered to be conspecific with *O. nigra*: Upware (?), 11.vii.1875, G. H. Verrall, 1 ♀; Chippenham, 7.v.1912, J. E. Collin, 1 ♀.

The reason why females are captured less often than males is unknown — possibly they fly less than the males, and are therefore less liable to be swept. They may fly for a short

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period of time sufficient only to join a swarm of males for the purpose of mating. Chandler (1976) has noted that females are often found *in copula*, which would tend to support this theory.

O. nigra appears to be widespread in Norfolk, and I can supply the following recent records for the county (those collected by J. W. Ismay are in Norwich Castle Museum): Earlham Woods (TG 1807), 11.v.1975, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Felbrigg Woods (TG 1840), 24.x.1975, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Dersingham Fen (TF 6729), 31.x.1975, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Swanton Novers (TG 0131), 2.xi.1975, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Upton Broad (TG 3813), 4.xi.1975, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Earlham Woods (TG 1807), 28.iv.1976, 5 ♂, 1 ♀, I.F.G.M.; Norman's Burrow Wood (TF 8923), 29.iv.1976, 2 ♀, J.W.I.; Upton Broad (TG 3913), 13.vi.1976, 1 ♂, J.W.I.; Easton (TG 1210), 23-30.vi.1976, 1 ♀, I.F.G.M.

Acknowledgment

I should like to thank John Ismay (now of the Hope Department at Oxford) for kindly placing his records at my disposal for this note.

References

- Chandler, P. J. 1972. The flat-footed flies (Diptera, Aschiza-Platyppezidae) known to occur in Kent, with a key to the genera and species so far recorded from the British Isles. *Trans. Kent Field Club*, 5: 15-44.
 Chandler, P. J. 1976. The Irish species of flat-footed flies (Diptera: Platyppezidae). *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, 18: 289-293.
 Verrall, G. H. 1901. *British Flies*, 8: London.

STRYMONIDIA W-ALBUM KNOCH IN HAMPSHIRE. — In Goater's *The Butterflies and Moths of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (1974, p. 224) it is stated of *Strymonidia w-album*: "Rare, local and elusive in Hampshire". It may be of interest to record therefore, that on three small twigs (ca. 12 in. long) cut at random from a wych elm near Kings Somborne in mid-February, were 19 ova of this butterfly. I cut the twigs intending to bring on the half-opened flower buds indoors in order to feed *w-album* larvae on the point of hatching from Dorset ova. The tree in question was the first of its kind located during an afternoon's drive and it was only after I returned home and rather casually examined the twigs that I realised my find. A return visit a week later confirmed excellent numbers of eggs on other branches of the same tree and also on another about 200 yards away. A newly hatched larva was noted at the same time. The first tree, unfortunately, is doomed as one branch is affected with Dutch elm disease which is rampant in the area. The other tree, as yet, seems healthy. — Dr. C. J. LUCKENS, 52 Thorold Road, Bitterne Park, Southampton, SO2 4JG.